



**STATE OF TENNESSEE  
DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION  
DIVISION OF MENTAL RETARDATION SERVICES  
ANDREW JACKSON BUILDING  
500 DEADERICK STREET, SUITE 1500  
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE 37243**

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** All Community Providers  
Developmental Center Staff  
Regional Office Staff  
Central Office Staff

**FROM:** Stephen H. Norris, Deputy Commissioner  
Division of Mental Retardation Services

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "SHN", is written over the "FROM:" line.

**DATE:** November 27, 2007

**SUBJECT:** **Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA) Infections**

This information was developed in response to concerns and questions about antibiotic resistant infections such as methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA).

*What is MRSA?*

- Some germs that commonly live on the skin and in the nose are called staphylococcus or "staph" bacteria. Staph bacteria in general do not cause any harm.
- When staph bacteria get inside the body through a break in the skin they can cause an infection.
- These infections are usually treated with antibiotics.
- When common antibiotics do not kill the staph bacteria it means the bacteria have become resistant to those antibiotics.
- This type of staph is called MRSA (Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus).

*What does MRSA look like?*

- Sores that look and feel like spider bites (However MRSA is **not** caused by a spider bite).
- Large, red, painful bumps under the skin (called boils).
- A cut that is swollen, hot and filled with pus.
- Blisters filled with fluid (called impetigo).

*It is important to report any suspicious skin infection to your doctor, immediately.*

*Why is it so serious?*

- MRSA infections can be mild, serious or even life threatening.
- MRSA is contagious and can be spread through skin-to-skin contact.

*Can my dog or cat get MRSA?*

- Pets, such as dogs or cats, can also get MRSA.
- Pets can have active infections and be carriers.
- If you see any signs of a skin infection on your pet, talk to your vet about testing your pet.
- Pets with MRSA can be treated.
- You do not need to get rid of your pet.

*When a person is being cared for at home, what precautions should be followed?*

- **Always wash your hands!**
- Caregivers should put on gloves, especially if they are helping to take care of the individual and likely to come in contact with the skin, blood, urine, wound or other body substances.
- Wash your hands after removing the gloves.
- Change your gloves and wash your hands between individuals.
- Visitors should always wash their hands before leaving.
- Periodically clean the person's room and personal items with a commercial disinfectant or a fresh solution of one part bleach and 100 parts water.
- Be sure to ask the health care provider about the precautions that should be taken at home.
- It is extremely important to maintain the individual's ability to socialize.
- Infected or colonized persons should be permitted to participate in group activities, if draining wounds are covered, bodily fluids are contained, and the person practices good hygienic practices. (Colonization means that the organism is present in or on the body but is not causing illness. Infection or being infected means that the organism is present and is causing illness.)

*What precautions should family care givers take for infected persons in their home?*

- First, follow good hygiene practices.
- Caregivers should wash their hands with soap and water after physical contact with the person and before leaving the home.
- Towels used for drying hands after contact should only be used once.
- Disposable gloves should be worn if contact with body fluids is expected and hands should be washed after removing gloves.
- Handle, transport, and process used linens soiled with blood, body fluids, secretions, and excretions in a manner that prevents skin and mucous membrane exposures, contamination of clothing, and transfer of microorganisms to others and environments.
- Linens should be changed and washed if they are soiled with body fluids.
- Ensure that frequently touched surfaces receive daily cleaning and when soiled with body fluids.
- In addition, tell any health care providers that the individual has MRSA.

*Is it safe to be in the same room as an individual with MRSA?*

- Healthy people are at very little risk of being infected with MRSA.
- As long as family members, caregivers and other visitors (including children) are healthy it is okay for them to be in the same room with a person with MRSA.
- Casual contact, such as touching, and hugging, is also okay.
- Be sure to wash your hands before you leave the individual's home.

*What is the state of Tennessee doing about MRSA to protect the citizens of Tennessee?*

- The Department of Health is working with health care organizations and providers to implement evidence based strategies to prevent infections through the recent statute reporting, changes to licensure rules and regulations, and statewide education and awareness campaigns. (Note: It is not meaningful or valid to attribute a case of invasive MRSA to a particular health care facility based on the way the data is reported to TDH).
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If you have any questions or need additional clarification, or would like for the developmental center nurse or regional nursing consultant to assist you with technical assistance/education on this subject, please contact the following representative in your area.

Central Office Nursing:  
Marlenia Overholt 615-253-6095

Community Nursing  
East Regional Office:  
Middle Regional Office:  
West Regional Office

Danny Ricker 423-787-6757 Ext.148  
Bernard McCarty 615-231-5445  
Linda Sain 901-745-7219

Developmental Center Nursing  
Arlington Developmental Center  
Clover Bottom Developmental Center  
Greene Valley Developmental Center

Johnenne Whitmore 901-745-7729  
Mary Dunn 615-231-5335  
Martha Fillers 423-787-6625

The following are links to more information resources on MRSA.

Information Source	Publication	Link to Web site
Division of Mental Retardation	<u>HOT SPOT</u> <b>October 2002</b> DMRS Publication MRSA	<a href="http://www.state.tn.us/dmrs/newsroom/publications/HotSpot/HotSpotOct2002.pdf">http://www.state.tn.us/dmrs/newsroom/publications/HotSpot/HotSpotOct2002.pdf</a>
Tennessee Department of Health	MRSA (Methicillin resistant <u>Staphylococcus aureus</u> ) Publications “ <u>Living with MRSA</u> ” <i>(The publication is available in English and in Spanish on the Department of Health web page)</i> <u>MRSA Tool Kits</u> Methicillin-Resistant Aureus (MRSA) <u>Infections Report and Recommendations of the Tennessee Department of Health Infections Task force March 2007</u> (Report to the legislators)	<a href="http://health.state.tn.us/MRSA/index.htm">http://health.state.tn.us/MRSA/index.htm</a>
U.S. Department	<u>Under-standing</u>	<a href="http://www3.niaid.nih.gov/healthscience/healthtopics/microbes/PDF/microbesbook">http://www3.niaid.nih.gov/healthscience/healthtopics/microbes/PDF/microbesbook</a>

of Health and Human Services National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases NIH	<u><b>MICROBES in Sickness and in Health</b></u>	
Centers for Disease Control (CDC)	Community- Associated MRSA Information for the Public	<a href="http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/ar_mrsa_ca_public.html#1">http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/ar_mrsa_ca_public.html#1</a>
Mayo Clinic	Hand washing: An Easy Way to Prevent Infection	<a href="http://www.mayoclinic.com/print/hand-washing/HQ00407/METHOD=print">http://www.mayoclinic.com/print/hand-washing/HQ00407/METHOD=print</a>

References used include those listed above:

SHN:MO

XC: Central Office Staff  
Regional Office Staff  
Developmental Center Staff  
Community Providers  
Dianne Dycus  
Quality Review Panel  
West Tennessee Federal Court Monitor